

## Hoof Disease Public Working Group Meeting Notes

23 October 2013, 2-5pm

WDFW Region 5 Office

In Attendance: B. Anderson (Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation), B. Armstrong (Sierra Pacific), D. Cothren (Wahkiakum County Commissioner), C. Madsen (NW Indian Fisheries Commission), J. Misner (Cowlitz County Commissioner), M. Rochelle (Weyerhaeuser), B. Schlecht (SW Land Access Coalition), M. Smith (Local resident/business owner), A. Swanson (Clark County Senior Policy Lead), WDFW Staff: S. Bergh, M. Cope, E. Holman, S. Jonker, K. Mansfield, P. Miller, J. Nelson, G. Norman, N. Pamplin

On Phone: Dr. T. Besser (Washington State University), Liz Dykstra (WA Department of Health) W. van Zwoll (Safari Club International WA State Chapters)

- Purpose of meeting is to provide the opportunity to: share information about the hoof disease phenomenon, discuss research and management questions with regard to hoof disease, and public outreach.
- WDFW is in the process of building a website for the group.
- Working group protocols (handout).
- Sandra Jonker (SJ) gave a PowerPoint presentation on the history, background, and current research/results.
- Questions and comments were made throughout the presentation:
  - Brian Anderson (BrAn) asked: Does it occur in Oregon? SJ and Kristin Mansfield (KM) answered that it does not, except for a few possible isolated cases, and that WDFW is working with ODFW veterinarians.
  - Mark Smith (MS) asked about historic reports from the 40s/50s/60s? Who is the main person/agency working on the diagnostics? Clarify what "other stuff" means in terms of adult affected elk collected. SJ answered that WDFW did not have records of historic reports. Technical Advisory Group provides guidance on protocol and diagnostics. KM answered that "other stuff" meant a variety of other bacteria and chronic infections.
  - BrAn asked about the non-significant finding results. KM explained each test and result.
  - Chris Madsen (CM) wanted to know the timeline for the Liverpool results. KM explained that they were expected soon, but the lab is a research lab and not a diagnostic lab.
  - MS noted that he has seen elk that are diseased and rotten up to the hock.
  - Dan Cothren (DC) detailed observations from the 2012 elk opening day where he saw elk infected inside that had a sickly smell from what he thought was bacteria going up into the meat. He told people to take their elk to a locker to get checked out. SJ and KM explained that a "sickly" smell would be typical with tainted meat; however, not necessarily from hoof disease given the results from this investigation indicate hoof disease is limited to hooves.

- This does not mean that an animal may be more prone to other factors/disease if not in good condition.
- MS asked: is it transmittable through birth? SJ and KM answered that we do not know the answer to that yet.
  - Barry Armstrong (BaAr) asked: were the collected elk taken randomly? SJ answered that the elk were taken opportunistically in areas where the disease is present. Herds with limping elk were targeted.
  - MS asked about changes in nutrition and the environment, which started a discussion about past and present forest management practices, recent elk nutrition studies, and the trace mineral results.
  - Bob Schlecht (BS) asked if we see this anywhere else, like Wyoming? KM answered no, although there has been something similar seen at the winter feeding area near Jackson Hole in the past, but it is not a chronic and spreading condition.
  - BaAr asked if we see this in Europe? KM answered that she has consulted with experts across the world and no documentation of something like this exists.
  - DC asked about forest practices, specifically log processing on the landings. DC also asked if it could be a gene? KM answered that we do not know if there is a genetic component to the disease.
  - MS stated that animals self-medicate and eat ash, which makes him question if they are getting the minerals that they need. He also asked about the increase in herbicide use and what herbicide does to the soil? He asked if we have tried domestic animal treatments on live elk? He asked about various strains? He also asked about a connection to manure spreading? KM answered that we have not captured live elk in an attempt to treat them yet. KM and SJ: There is no scientific evidence that chemicals can cause this kind of disease in animals, and no link has been made between herbicides and hoof disease in any species that we are aware of. Timber companies use similar herbicide treatments along the West Coast, yet elk populations in other areas have not exhibited the symptoms associated with hoof disease seen in southwest Washington. The University of Alberta and the National Council for Air and Stream Improvement (NCASI) are currently examining habitat characteristics of the landscape and areas used by elk, which may help to inform our understanding of this issue.
  - BaAr asked about the life expectancy of an elk with hoof disease? SJ answered that we do not know, we only have the very limited information from radio-collared elk in the Mt. St. Helens herd.
  - CM asked how quickly is it spreading? Has the rate of spread increased? If we do nothing will it spread across all of western Washington? SJ answered that we do not know prevalence and have not measured the rate of spread in a rigorous way. The agency conducted a hunter survey in 2010 and the spread was qualitatively shown in the hunter recall results of that survey.
  - DC stated that it has escalated in the last ten years in Wahkiakum County.

- The next portion of the meeting was dedicated to discussing management options:
  - Purpose is for working group to discuss each of the 4 examples of management options described in the presentation and to evaluate if any of these examples of management options are likely to be effective and to consider: Effect on population, Cost, Feasibility, Sustainability, Resources, and Priority.
  - SJ started the discussion with the option of reducing elk density in the affected area.
  - MS stated that we are already doing this at Mt. St. Helens and with the high hunter pressure there we do not allow the spread of animals and they cannot migrate. He stated that we need tighter hunting seasons.
  - DC stated that the seasons are too long and that there are too few elk in Wahkiakum County. There elk move into the valleys because of logging in the forests and then become a problem with agricultural damage. He stated that we need to stop shooting healthy cows.
  - BaAr asked what is the downside of culling animals, especially to stop the spread of the disease?
  - James Misner (JM) agreed with BaAr.
  - Axel Swanson (AS) stated that he was not sure about the idea of culling and that a lot of elk would be culled by his house.
  - BS asked if you could study the culled elk and use those elk to help figure out the cause? He also stated that he was in favor of culling a very diseased elk.
  - BrAn stated that there is a “middle ground” with culling.
  - MS stated that you could take elk to treat them and therefore not cull all of them.
  - AS stated that he is uncomfortable with culling when we do not know the cause of the disease.
  - BS stated that we should find out the prevalence.
  - JM suggested that we find a pregnant animal with the disease and hold it captive for study.
  - Liz Dykstra asked if the trace minerals are important to hooves? Mineral blocks? Is there a way to get them nutrition without grouping them? Could you compare nutrient levels with those in captive elk like the elk at Northwest Trek?
  - MS stated that the first step is containment of the disease.
  - Tom Besser stated that we assume it is infectious, but we don't know and need to know range and prevalence (and are they changing?). He stated that interventions like culling may muddy the water in terms of knowing prevalence.
  - AS asked what the plan is to get the word out to hunters? He also asked about funding from the upcoming legislative session? Nate Pamplin (NP) answered that we have a paragraph in the big game pamphlet and a webpage and online reporting tool. He also explained that the department has asked for funding for a westside veterinarian to work on hoof disease as well as shell disease in Western pond turtles.
  - DC suggested that we put out mineral blocks.
  - MS asked about funding from the Western Governors' Association? NP explained the department's funding sources and processes.

- DC suggested to watch the Nemah Block area (Pacific County) where there is limited access on Hancock Timber lands to see if the elk there develop hoof disease. KM and Mick Cope responded that we are currently doing so.
  - CM asked if we will know whether or not the disease is infectious by the December meeting and what can be done in the meantime? KM responded that results are pending and are hoping results will be forthcoming soon, but cannot be certain of timeline for the completion of analyses given the complicated and difficult isolation processes.
  - AS asked about the number of limping elk (non-hoof disease) that just naturally occur? KM responded that we do not know exact numbers and gave examples of different conditions.
  - MS suggested that a containment plan be drafted by the December meeting.
  - BaAr stated that two things could be done in the short-term: get public reports and sample elk between 3-9 months.
  - In addition, Hoof Disease Working Group Input comments captured on PowerPoint presentation (see Management Discussion handout).
- The final portion of the meeting was set aside for public comments:
    - Bruce Barnes: Held a bottle of Round-up Extra and asked everyone to look at the ingredients. He is concerned that the agency still sells tags and does not warn hunters. He suggested that we will soon see limping elk in Washougal because Weyerhaeuser took it over. He stated that the elk are not an endangered species and that is why nothing is being done. He wants his kids to see elk outside of a zoo and wants to do something and volunteer and acknowledged his past rocky relationship with the department. He suggested that timber companies stop using chemicals for the next five years and we can see what happens with the elk.
    - Mike Kimele: He has been hunting elk at Mt. St. Helens for over 20 years and this is his first public meeting. He remembered reading about a study to thin the Mt. St. Helens herd. He hunts at Climber's Bivouac. He stated that the seasons are out of control and there are not near as many elk. The elk are chased too much and they do not have a chance to rest and be healthy. He stated that these things are frustrating for a little guy. Lewis River area is the most heavily hunted spot. He suggested soil testing at Mt. St. Helens.
  - After public comments were finished a discussion of the timing of the next meeting occurred.
    - A doodle poll will be sent to find a date and time for the next meeting.